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NEAR EAST - AFRICA

3. Iraq planning to build up defense:

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Baghdad will soon ask Washington and London for assistance in assessing Iraq's part in defending its own territory and the Western world, according to Iraqi Foreign Minister al Suwaidi. He said that Iraq is planning to improve its defense as rapidly and completely as possible because of its vulnerability to a Soviet attack through Iran. This danger was called to the attention of the Foreign Minister by the Turkish Charge in Baghdad during conversations on establishment of a Middle East defense system.

Comment: Iraq may now be willing to accept the military assistance offered by the United States last November and thus join Syria and Egypt in seeking substantial American military aid.

WESTERN EUROPE

4. Bidault reportedly urging delay in Belgian EDC ratification:

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According to a source close to Belgian Foreign Minister van Zeeland, French Foreign Minister Bidault has been pressuring Van Zeeland to delay EDC ratification. The informant adds that circles close to the Belgian royal household do not wish to take any action that would annoy the French.

Comment: Van Zeeland, who is close to the royal circle, has frequently voiced the need for early action on the treaty, but has apparently pursued stalling tactics. The American Embassy in Brussels estimates that, despite some opposition within the government party, there is enough outside support for a two-thirds favorable vote.

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The Belgian Government appears to fear that in ratifying the treaty before favorable French action is assured, it would be risking further domestic embarrassment such as it experienced when the other EDC countries failed to follow its lead in adopting a 24-month conscription period.